

TRANSITION

Transition is a process which should formally begin in the pre-K years. We have identified 5 major transition points in the educational career of blind and visually impaired students they are:

1. First Steps to Early Childhood (Pre Kindergarten)
2. Early Childhood to Kindergarten (part B)
3. Elementary to Middle/Junior High
4. Middle/Junior High to High School
5. High school to College or Work (post graduation)

There are others, some are not so well defined. These we feel are the place to start for our purposes. They are the most reflective of the students we are charged to serve.

Stage One

Transition from First Steps to the Early Childhood Special Education programs are taken seriously by First Steps and ECSE personnel and usually managed well. The issue that should be noted for First Steps services for vision needs is that in much of the rural parts of the state there is typically no service available to families. In the past, MOSPIN has provided some parent training services to families of birth to 3 year olds; however with the reorganization of the First Steps services, these are no longer available to a large number of infants/toddlers and their families in the more rural parts of Missouri. Many families must drive to the metropolitan areas to access these services at centers such as Delta Gamma in St. Louis and CCVI in Kansas City. This is an issue that may require additional information and may also need to be addressed through DESE and the SICC.

Stage Two

ECSE to Kindergarten (Part B services): This is basically a transition to regular school. It means a transition to an increasing academic program and gradually away from a developmental model. This raises many issues regarding continued therapies and new needs. This transition is most often not well designed, thereby leaving the student at a disadvantage for learning vital skills for continued Progress. This transition stage should be designated to teaching continued basic reading (Braille and/or books on tape training) and reading comprehension, travel, computer, learning comprehension, advocacy and listening skills, which are often overlooked until problems are noticed and a student is already beginning to fall behind.

Stage Three

Elementary to Middle School/Junior High: -- At this level academics are the basis for services. The more demanding schedule along with the increased changes in teachers, environment and needs begin to take a toll on the ill prepared student. Implementations of accommodations, modifications, and support services, which can appear to working well in the elementary grades, begin to fall apart. This transition is difficult enough for students without the added difficulty of multiple implementers. In addition, increasing demands of regular education programs throw up additional barriers to those students who have not been properly prepared for the rigors the demands Middle School places on them. It is vital, at this stage, that students be aware of their own needs, be able to

begin to advocate for themselves, and have good reading, comprehension and travel skills. In addition, this transition stage is vital to their future life goals. In that light, this stage should be handled with all parties understanding the importance of the goals. This transition stage should include life skills, travel skills (beyond the school setting), more intense computer training, continued reading, comprehension, listening skills training along with the addition of college search and an eye on future goals.

Stage Four

High School – This transition is by-and-large the most acknowledged by the schools and by IDEA. It is the most emphasized transition point of all the transitions. By the time a student is in High school, if stages have been left out, many VI students find themselves in a most difficult position, if, they have not received additional help. High School is the culmination of all the other stages in their school career. Through both Junior and Senior High, teams need to consider post graduation goals and needs. Although both the FEDS and DESE have emphasized this transition point, it still remains a problem due to misunderstandings, miscommunication, lack of coordination and thorough consideration. A failure to consider, plan for, and meet the early educational needs of the VI student which also include the continued in-service training of those who work directly with the students is key. This transition stage should be dedicated to looking towards college or work after high school. At this stage the student should be self guided, for the most part, with little assistance for the daily tasks of school. This course will prepare each student for the challenging and exciting future they face ahead. This should be the goal of all who work with the students.

Stage Five

Post Graduation: Lastly, this stage should be mostly self-guided with the student advocating as an adult for what he needs. This is the time that all his/her education and training should come together to help them move into the adult world without Fear of what's ahead and confident that they are well prepared for the demanding future they face.

RSB maintains a Children's Service component which is dedicated to addressing the first 4 major transition points and is charged with the responsibility of involvement in the last. Even so, much needs to be done within RSB as well as the public education system to coordinate, improve reporting and address all the transition needs of Missouri's VI students.

Transition is one of the most critical components of the blind and visually impaired student's educational careers. Although it is key, it is often glossed over, overlooked or left out of the IEP process completely. To this end we have taken a brief look at the major transition points for the state's VI students. From this exercise the following recommendations were formed:

1. There seems to be a need for a statewide standard, policy and procedure for transition implementation in the districts
2. Transition services should be required at every level for a VI student educational career

3. In-service training should be a requirement for all personnel working directly with a VI student. Training should include information on how to address and implement the transition plan.
4. Transition information for each educational stage should be provided to both teachers and parents alike